**Advancement and Merit Badge 101**

**Boy Scout Rank Advancement:**

The pace of boy scout rank advancement is owned by the scout himself – it is not driven by age, grade or years in scouting. It is also not owned by the scout leaders. It is the responsibility of each scout to own their own advancement.

Each scout upon joining gets a copy of the Boy Scout Handbook that contains detailed information on a variety of skills that scouts need to demonstrate to advance in rank. That book should be brought to every meeting or camp out and is critical to a scout’s records. We strongly suggest protective covers and making copies of signed off pages in case of loss or damage. The specific skills for each rank are listed in the back of the book with places indicated next to each for sign off by scout leaders. Certain of those skills should be demonstrated on camp outs or other outdoor settings, others can be demonstrated indoors.

Each scout is responsible for preparing and mastering the skills. To do that they can ask for assistance from others in the Troop. Each troop has at least one troop guide, who has a role in assisting younger scouts. But scouts should be comfortable asking patrol leaders or any other scout for assistance. They can also ask for advice from scout leaders. Ultimately when a scout is comfortable that they have mastered a skill, they should talk with a scout leader and make the time to demonstrate the mastery of that skill. Leaders will evaluate if a scout has successfully demonstrated the skill and sign the scout’s books (they will also sign off the same step in the electronic record maintained in “Scoutbook”). If mastery has not been demonstrated, the leader will provide feedback on what needs to be done better and will be available to re-review with the scout at a later date. Camp outs and troop meetings are good times to get requirements signed off. Leaders are also available (by appointment to be made by the scout, not the parent) on weekends and evenings with sufficient advance notice. Note that on regular Tuesday meetings, we will make every effort to have at least one scout leader available at 6:30 and at least one scout leader available to stay a few minutes after the regular meeting, that way the scout can participate in the meeting. Note that scouts tend to get comfortable seeking out one or two leaders, we may ask them to work with a different leader from time to time.

As a scout reaches a point where they have completed all requirements for rank other than scout spirit; scoutmaster conference and board of review, they should contact the Scoutmaster to make an appointment to complete a conference which will also cover the scout spirit requirement. Then they will need to contact the advancement chair to set up a Board of Review (these are scheduled every month and are in the Scoutbook calendar).

**Attendance:**

In order to be making rank, there is an expectation that scouts are active in the troop and regularly attending events and meetings. We understand that from time to time, other activities and life in general make attendance difficult. We also know that many of the boys have seasons of the year, where they have more demands on their schedule than time will allow. Attendance every week is not required, but we do have a 50% minimum in order to rank advance – that’s 50% over the time since last rank advancement and not measured monthly. If a Scout can not meet this minimum requirement, please schedule an appointment with the Scoutmaster to figure out a way in which the boy can avoid losing out.

**Service Hours:**

In order to obtain rank, most ranks require service hours. The troop will have regular service projects scheduled throughout the year, but outside service hours are also permitted. If using outside service hours, please provide a written note outlining what was done, who benefited, how many hours and signed off (with contact info) by an adult responsible for the project. Note that service hours for some ranks require a minimum number of conservation related hours. Also note, that any service projects performed at camp sites that benefit the camp and scouting in general, while important, do not count for the service hour requirement. In the back of the Boy Scout Handbook is a place to track service hours – please make sure a scout leader signs off on each as evidence.

**Camping and the Outdoors:**

Each month there are camping opportunities available for scouts. There are also a number of Summer programs and other outdoor activities. While it is not expected that all scouts attend all camp outs, certain requirements for rank advancement can not be performed outside of a camping setting. If a scout or a parent is uncomfortable with camping, we suggest that they schedule a scoutmaster conference to discuss. In the back of the Boy Scout Handbook is a place to track camping nights – please make sure a scout leader signs off on each as evidence

**Merit Badges:**

Once a scout has completed (the First Class Rank), the primary driver of rank advancement is the completion of merit badges. We do not suggest waiting till then to start doing merit badges, rather we suggest that a scout always have at least one that they are working on. Summers and other school breaks are a great time to get them done. Also there is a designated merit badge day put on by Patriots Path Council the first Saturday in November, where a scout can work on up to 4 merit badges.

Here is how the process works:

* First a scout identifies what merit badges they want to earn – there are more than 137 that they can pick from. A good place to learn more is meritbadge.org
* Once a scout has determined what merit badge to do, he should contact the scoutmaster to obtain a signed blue card and a merit badge counselor (a scout leader within the district that is an expert on the subject). If the Scoutmaster has concerns about the complexity of the merit badge and/or the scout’s ability to get it done at the age and skill level they have, the scoutmaster will meet with the scout to discuss. Note that there are a number of merit badges that are designated as Eagle required – these specific badges must be done to achieve Eagle; the balance of the merit badges are elective. Eagle, Life and Star all require a minimum number of elective and Eagle merit badges be completed.
* A scout can download and print a worksheet to document their efforts at meritbadge.org. The scout can also purchase merit badge books from the scout store or Ramsey Outdoor in Succasunna. Note that we also have a library that has certain merit badges that can be checked out at St. Matthews or downloaded from our Troop share drive. <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/0B7jHe2OWDvLuVmhld2VEdHFwZlk?usp=sharing>

If a scout has merit badge books that they no longer need, we ask that they donate them to our library.

* A scout should generally review if the merit badge requires advance discussions with the merit badge counselor on any requirements and should outline a plan with the counselor. In many cases the counselor will ask that the scout complete all requirements and document them in the worksheet prior to meeting with them live. In other cases it will be necessary to have several meetings throughout the merit badge completion process.
* Once all requirements are done and the counselor has signed off the blue card as completed, the counselor will retain 1/3 of the blue card and the scout will return the balance to the scoutmaster for signature and the advancement chair for retention and record keeping. The scout will be asked to retain 1/3 of the blue card for his records. Merit badges are awarded at the courts of honor.

**Timing:**

How quickly a scout moves through the ranks is entirely up to them. We are committed to giving every opportunity possible for advancement and success. That said, we are still constantly asked is my scout advancing quickly enough. Here is the Troop 109 view: Not every scout will make eagle and it should not be looked as negatively if a scout chooses not to make eagle. The scouting program is about life skills and life lessons. There is no other program like it. If you really want a rule of thumb, here are some thoughts and guidelines.

* The more active a scout is in their first year, the better. They will have a better experience, adjust more quickly to being a part of the troop and rank up that much faster.
* There is a slogan that you may hear in various scouting circles “First Class in a Year”. The idea is that within a year or so (generally measured as the end of the 6th grade), a scout has achieved the rank of First Class. In reality, this almost never happens, but if a scout wants a stretch goal, go for it!
* We normally expect that an active scout, particularly one that attends the Sabbattis camp their first year, will complete the scout rank and the tenderfoot rank and be well on their way to second class by the end of 6th grade.
* First class can be achieved in 7th grade; 8th grade Star and 9th Grade Life.
* That means most boys will be trying for Eagle in their sophomore or junior years in high school.
* We have had scouts make Eagle as Freshman (rarely) and we have had them do it as Seniors (frequently). There is no hard and fast rule. What we have found is that as scouts get into high school, the workload increases and the distractions and other activities take on an increasing amount of their time. So the more they can do to advance their scout career in middle school, the better.
* Last point on this, most scouts go in spurts - that is they get a lot accomplished in short periods and then seem to stagnate for a while. This is normal and very recoverable.

**Questions:** If a scout or a parent has any questions or concerns they can always schedule time with the scoutmaster to discuss. We want all our boys to succeed